

Swarthmore College

Works

English Literature Faculty Works

English Literature

2005

Terra Teratalogica

Nathalie Anderson

Swarthmore College, nanders1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-english-lit>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to these works benefits you](#)

Recommended Citation

Nathalie Anderson. (2005). "Terra Teratalogica". *Conscious Mapping: Poets Journey Through Verbal Geography*. 4-4.

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-english-lit/255>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Literature Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

Terra Teratologica

Nathalie Anderson

After Caius Julius Solinus: C. Iulii Solini Polyhistor, *Rerum Toto Orbe Memorabilium thesaurus locupletissimus*, Basel, 1543.

My Dearest Doctor Dee: If it's not one Thing
it'll be another. North, at the curling lip
of the Mare Congelatum, the frozen sea,
it's Anthropophagi, who'd as soon swallow you
as talk with you at table. South, where the mountains

sweat to float the Nile, it's Troglodytae, cave-things, wild
to bury you. *Terra es, terram ibis*: you're dirt to them;
they'll speed to spade you under. Go East? The worms they raise
in Sym and Seres sup on forests, bolt men whole.
And in the West, the honeyed lands? Doctor, consider the bees.

By sea, no safer. Off Madagascar it's Gorgones.
Elsewhere a mapmaker, at a loss for proper names, looks
to sketch the danger: sinuous seas looped and knotted, ships
gripped to the rigging, oceans reared up badger-faced and
spewing oceans. Earth shakes. Ships sink. No such thing

as terra firma. Still, my invitation stands. Are you
with me, Doctor Dee? The towering twinned columns
of Alexandria are fallen, the altars of Caesar
overturned. In Arabia Deserta – steeped so deep
in incense once, they called it “felix,” happy – the sands hunch now

like great cats, slink and pounce like cats, watch – ocelis – with cats' eyes.
Even the kittens bare their claws. When the hand of every Thing
is turned against you, it's no time to show your own hand. That's why
I live in terra incognita, where every bush
is bladed, every coast is cleared, and every strange Thing

held at bay. I urge you, Doctor: leave Samara on the Volga, leave
Samarra on the Tigris, leave Samartia on the Black Sea, leave
Samaria and Samarkand behind. Here, what we have is
newer, cleaner, emptier. See for yourself: my door
is open for you; my house is your house; my terra

is your terra.

(*Terra es, terram ibis*: “Dust thou art, to dust thou shalt return.”)